Response to the Report of Transition Houses, Women's Centres and Men's Intervention Programs

"Strengthening Family Violence Services in Nova Scotia: Next Steps"

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NOVA SCOTIA

Community Services

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Message from the Deputy Minister

I am pleased to present the Department of Community Services' response to the report on the provision of family violence services by the coalition of Transition Houses, Men's Intervention Programs and Women's Centres in Nova Scotia. Family violence programs are vital services in our communities, and we are committed to working hard to provide services for people who are experiencing violence in their family lives.

In May 2003 the Department received the report. Since that time, staff and I have extensively reviewed the report, and discussed the best way to proceed. The background information and several of the recommendations in the report will form the basis of further work to improve services.

There are currently many good programs and services in place to help victims and perpetrators of family violence. As needs change, we must continually work to ensure services are accessible, effective and meet local needs.

One thing we have learned through the departmental regional service delivery model, which has been confirmed in the report, is that we need to look to the community when planning programs and services. Although there are similarities, each community and the people who live in them are unique. One solution will not fit all regions in the province.

Now is the time to work together at the community level to ensure we have sustainable programs that meet the needs of the women, children and men they serve. To that end, this response does not address the recommendations in detail; instead it lays out a plan for working with service providers to finalize details and next steps tailored to specific community needs.

We look forward to working in partnership with the coalition members to enhance programs, address emerging trends, and ensure sustainable programs are in place to meet the needs of women, children and men in Nova Scotia.

Marian Tyson, QC
Deputy Minister

Introduction

This document outlines the next steps of the planning process and development of an action plan to ensure the long-term sustainability of family violence programs for women, children and men in Nova Scotia. This work will take place at the community level, and will build on the coalition report.

All planning is intended to be consistent with the mission and strategic goals of the Department of Community Services, in order to ensure that a comprehensive range of accessible, core family violence services are available to women, children and men across the province.

The Department of Community Services is a proud partner in the funding and provision of services that support women and children in abusive situations, and in the development of programs and services that help prevent family violence.

Background

In April 2002, the Department of Community Services launched a redesign process with the respective programs, collectively named "Family Violence Programs", which are funded by the Department.

These programs are:

- Transition Houses
- Men's Intervention Programs
- Women's Centres

Through various meetings, the parameters for the planning process were developed and agreed upon, and the three groups met collectively to develop a report that was delivered to the Department in May 2003. The report laid the groundwork and made suggestions for change, which will form the basis of the next steps in this process.

The purpose of this document is to lay out the next steps for the process consistent with departmental goals; the existing context of the changing climate; available resources; competing priorities and the service needs of women, children and men in Nova Scotia.

Context

Mission

The Department of Community Services Mission Statement:

> *We are committed to promoting the independence, self-reliance, security and well-being of the people we serve.*

The Department of Community Services fulfills this mandate through leadership and partnerships with other government departments and community-based organizations. Together we provide a province-wide network of social services to vulnerable Nova Scotians, to ensure their participation and contribution to the social and economic well-being of the province. This is in keeping with government's strategic goal that envisions a province of healthy, prosperous and self-sufficient Nova Scotians.

One of the core program areas of the Department of Community Services is Family & Children's Services. The work of this division recognizes that the success of Nova Scotia's future is based on providing safe and nurturing environments for children and their families, which support them in meeting their full potential.

Programs

To help realize government's goal of healthy, prosperous and self-sufficient Nova Scotians, the Department of Community Services funds a range of community-outreach, prevention-oriented support services to children, youth and their families; Transition Houses for abused women and their children; Intervention Programs for abusive men and Women's Centres. Although these programs receive funding from various sources, the Department is the primary funder.

Funding for 2003/2004:

•	Transition Houses	$4,095,126
•	Men's Treatment Programs	$ 568,634
•	Women's Centres	$ 700,000
	TOTAL:	**$5,363,760 Million**

Included in the above figure is a July 2003 funding increase for Transition Houses and Men's Intervention Programs, of approximately $350,000, to provide wage increases to their staff. This was a 9.3% increase in salaries.

Transition Houses

Government funding began in the early 1980s following the establishment of Bryony House, the province's first Transition House, in Halifax in 1978. The number of Transition Houses gradually grew to nine, with the last houses established in Port Hawkesbury and Amherst in the early 1990s.

Transition Houses in Nova Scotia currently provide the following services:

- 24-hour emergency accommodation seven days a week
- 24-hour crisis line
- emotional support
- children's services
- individual and group counselling
- food, shelter and basic needs
- information
- referral
- advocacy
- second-stage housing
- outreach programs

- follow-up
- public education
- crisis intervention

Transition Houses are primarily funded based on the number of beds they have, and receive annual funding grants in quarterly payments. All Transition Houses supplement their funding through community-based fundraising.

Until 1997, the Department provided 75% of the budgets through direct grants, with the remaining 25% provided by the municipalities through per diems. Starting in 1997 with the municipal service exchange, the Department assumed responsibility for social services in Nova Scotia and the per diem system was eliminated. The Department revised the funding mechanism and began providing all funding through direct grants.

The Department funds nine Transition Houses in Nova Scotia:

- **Byrony House**, *Halifax*
- **Harbour House**, *Bridgewater*
- **Chrysalis House**, *Kentville*
- **Juniper House,** *Yarmouth*
- **Third Place Transition House**, *Truro*
- **Tearmann House,** *New Glasgow*
- **Autumn House**, *Amherst*
- **Cape Breton Transition House,** *Sydney*
- **Leeside,** *Port Hawkesbury*

Men's Intervention Programs

There are six Men's Intervention Programs in Nova Scotia funded by the Department:

- **New Start**, *Halifax*
- **Alternatives,** *Bridgewater*
- **New Directions,** *Amherst*
- **New Leaf**, *New Glasgow*
- **Bridges,** *Truro*
- **Second Chance,** *Sydney*

Men's Intervention Programs are funded by direct grants on a quarterly basis to provide services to male perpetrators of spousal abuse. Referrals are received from a variety of sources, with approximately 50 per cent from the justice sector and 50 per cent from community agencies, such as Children's Aid Societies.

Men's Intervention Programs in Nova Scotia are currently funded to provide the following services:

- intake
- assessments
- psycho-educational groups
- individual counselling
- counselling for safety planning and support through a part-time women's support worker

Women's Centres

There are seven funded Women's Centres in Nova Scotia. The department has also provided interim funding to a new women's centre in Yarmouth, and discussions are underway regarding how this centre can be supported in the future. Women's Centres are currently funded to provide direct service for:

- support
- information
- referral
- advocacy

Each of the seven funded Women's Centres receives an annual grant in the amount of $100,000, paid in quarterly installments. Several Women's Centres also partner with other organizations such as Human Resources Development Canada, to participate in projects designed to meet the specific local needs of women in their area, including job-readiness programs. The seven Women's Centres are:

- **Every Woman's Centre**, *Sydney*
- **Antigonish Women's Resource Centre**, *Antigonish*
- **Pictou County Woman's Centre**, *New Glasgow*
- **Lea Place**, *Sheet Harbour*
- **A Woman's Place**, *Lawrencetown*
- **Central Nova Woman's Centre**, *Truro*
- **Second Story Women's Centre**, *Bridgewater*

The services provided by Transition Houses, Men's Intervention Programs and Women's Centres have a significant impact on several of the key determinants of health and well being, including:

- social support systems
- physical and social environments
- healthy child development

There is a recognized need for government intervention to address social problems, such as family violence. On behalf of Nova Scotians collectively, the government mandate is to protect vulnerable citizens in a manner that is accountable to the taxpayers who fund these programs, and is sustainable over the long term.

Principles

To ensure that programs and services are in place now and in the future, one of the Department of Community Services' strategic goals is to provide services in an effective and accountable manner through efficient service delivery. It is imperative that programs and services funded by the Department be flexible enough to effectively respond to changing client needs, while reducing redundancy and improving service delivery within available resources.

In terms of family violence programs and services, the Department has identified the following operating principles as critical to its mission. These principles provide the criteria to measure program and service planning:

Co-ordinated: Department of Community Services works together with other departments and all service providers to ensure services are delivered in a coordinated manner.

Community-based: A responsive and effective family violence program has input from the community and service providers (Transition Houses, Women's Centres and Men's Intervention Programs) in assessing needs and trends, and in the planning and strategic development of services. Services are delivered locally.

Sustainable: Family violence programs and services must be fiscally responsible by delivering quality services to the clients they serve within the context of available resources. Service expectations, outcomes and funding will be established for funded services.

Socially Responsible: Family violence programs and services will be socially responsible by ensuring that programs are responsive to changing client needs, reach target populations and achieve the objectives for which they were created.

These principles are founded on the beliefs and values of the Department of Community Services:

- safety for women and their children
- timely access to services
- a continuum of supports
- involvement of the sector
- best practices

Trends

Changes in how services are delivered, the people being served and other related initiatives have impacted on the way family violence programs are provided in Nova Scotia. These trends include:

Decreased Occupancy Rates in Transition Houses in Rural Areas
Annual admissions to Transition Houses have declined from 1,037 women in 1992 - 1993 to 869 women in 2002 - 2003. Days of care provided has declined from 28,566 to 24,464 in that same time period, while the number of children served has declined from 970 to 547. These decreased rates are primarily seen in Transition Houses located in rural areas.

Increased Number of Services in the Community
An increased demand for services has led to the creation of other strategies that provide increased protection for victims of spousal violence such as the *Domestic Violence Intervention Act*. Emergency response for victims of family violence are now available in appropriate cases through Emergency Protection Orders that can be obtained on a 24/7 basis to ensure a victim's safety needs are met.

Statistical Evidence
Statistics indicate there is an escalating demand for outreach services. Many women who require services do not access emergency accommodation, but do require some support service to help them escape violent situations.

Next Steps

The next steps in moving the mutual goals of service providers and the Department forward will be based on the shared objective of providing high-quality, comprehensive and community-based service to women, children and men at the local level.

Two different processes are planned to address the unique needs of the different programs:

a) Transition Houses and Men's Intervention Programs

Based on the stated mission, goals and principles of the Department specific to this program area, the Department intends to build on the work completed to date, including information contained in the May 2002 coalition report.

Core services to be funded by government will be identified with targets and outcomes to-be-determined. The next step is to further develop regional plans, which may include establishing pilot projects at the regional level.

Representatives from regional offices and the head office of the Department of Community Services will meet with the respective service providers in each region to proceed with further development of regional plans to address community needs. Outcome measures will be developed as part of the process, either regionally or individually, depending on the geography and program. Regional plans will be required to meet the principles as defined above.

b) Women's Centres

Women's Centres have presented their program area as a unique one that, while engaged in some service delivery related to family violence, has a more generic service for women with respect to many diverse issues.

Seven Women's Centres are funded by Department of Community Services (an eighth one has been provided with some interim funding) for the purpose of provision of direct services.

The *Snapshot of Services* in January 2003 provided by the Women's Centres to the Department of Community Services demonstrates linkages to many of the Prevention Programs currently being offered by Family Resource Centres. Accordingly, the Department of Community services will work with Women's Centres to explore opportunities for partnerships between the Women's Centres and Family Resource Centres as a means of enhancing and strengthening many of the prevention programs currently being provided separately by each.

The next step for Women's Centres will be a separate planning process with this group, similar to the one outlined for Transition Houses and Men's Intervention Programs. This process will include identification of core services to be funded by the Department, and targets with outcome measures. Regional and head office Department of Community Services staff will work with Women's Centres to develop and implement these plans.

Conclusion

The Department values the services provided by members of the coalition and the goal is to ensure the sustainability of services over the long term. A comprehensive range of accessible, core family violence services are required for women, men and children in Nova Scotia. This goal can only be achieved by working together with service providers.

We realize there will be challenges but are committed to ensuring, and hopefully strengthening, core services, while ensuring their viability. We look forward to moving ahead with the process.